PRATHAM BOOKS

Home

Author: Fausto Aarya De Santis
Illustrator: Ogin Nayam

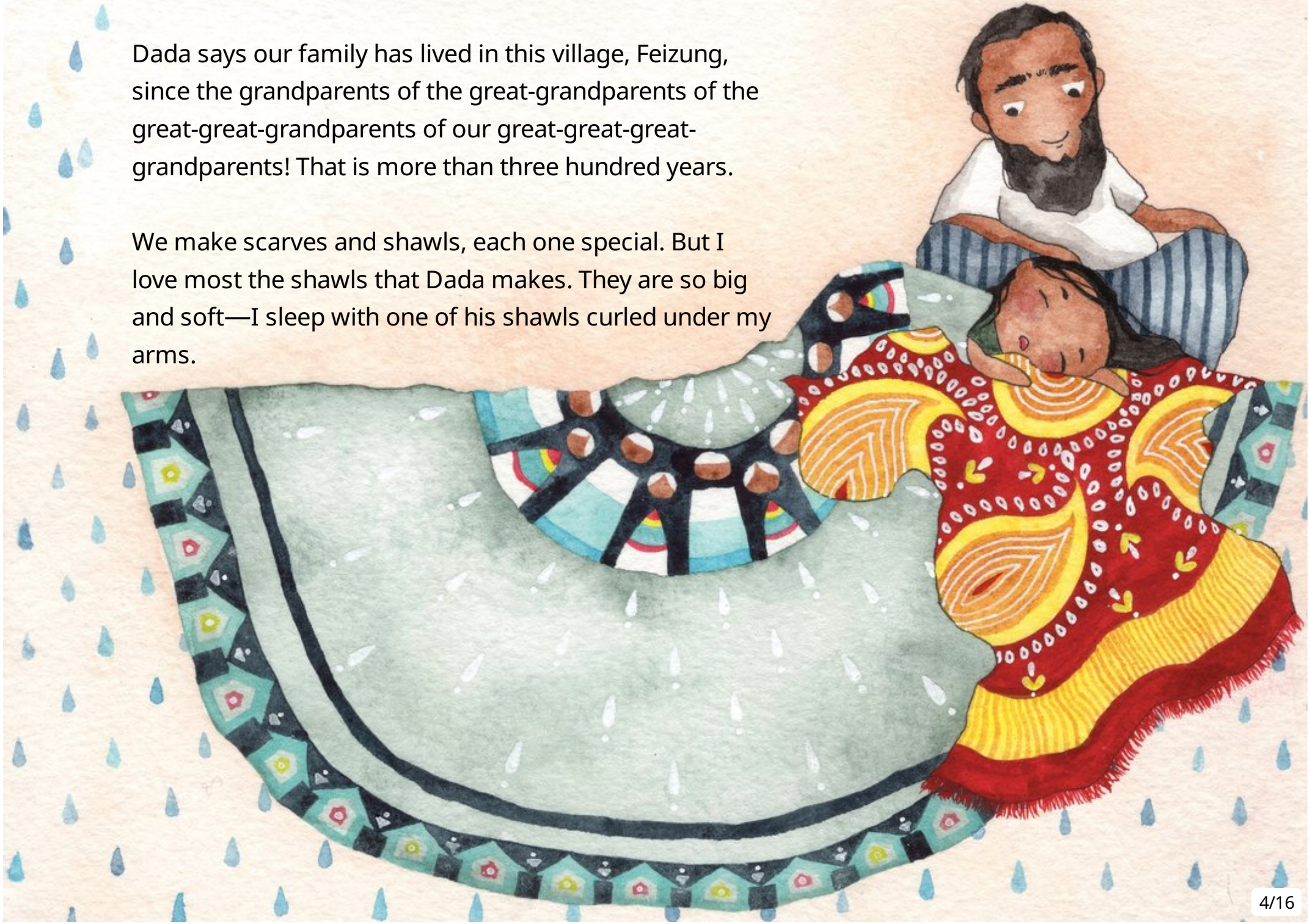
Level 4

“Tip-top drip-drop,” I sing with the rain,
jumping over puddles on my way home
from school. The crinkly metal sheets
covering the houses in our village sing
along: “Tip-tip-drop
drip-drip-top.”

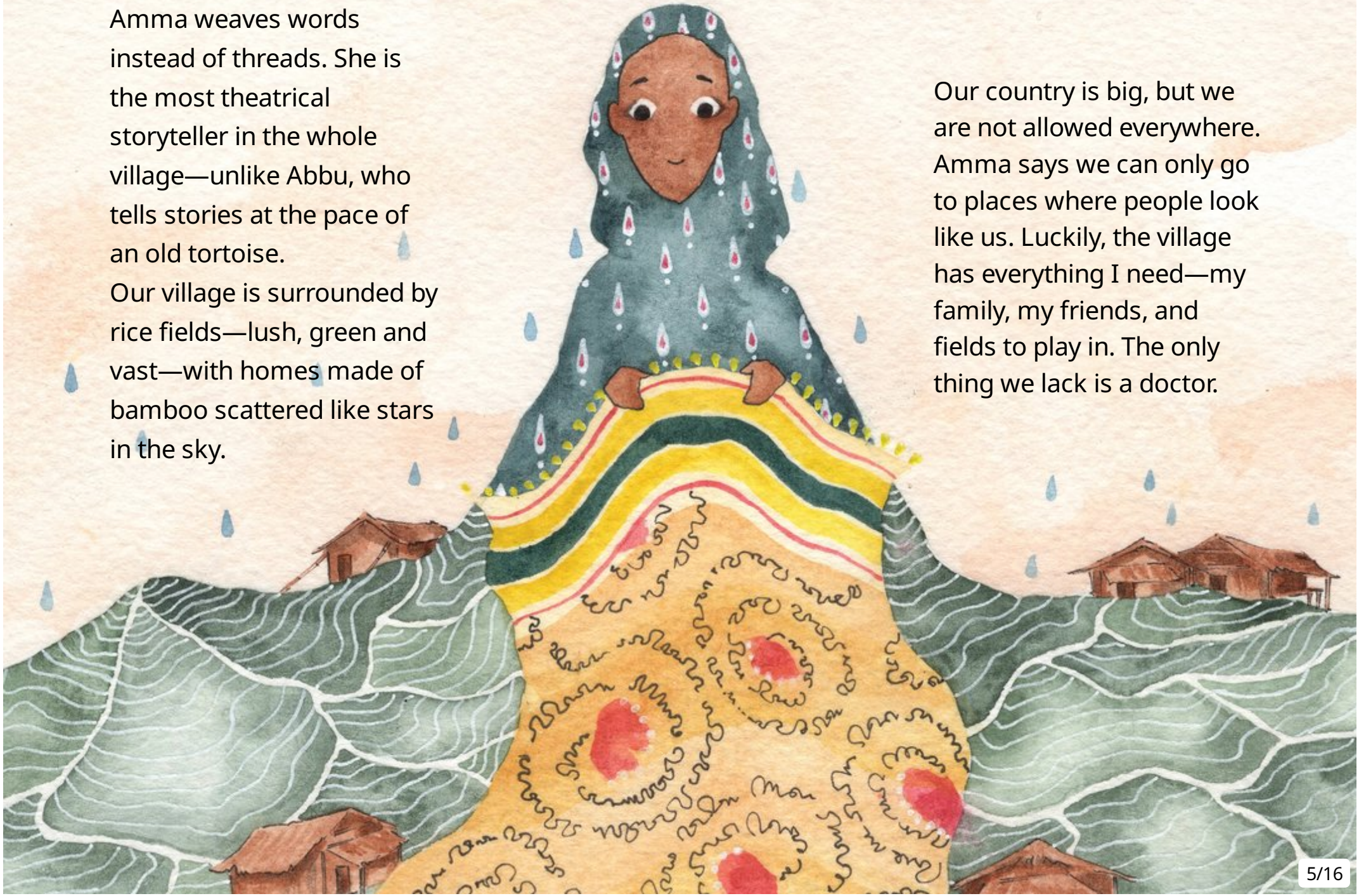
I love the rain! But sometimes I completely disapprove of it. It’s not as bad as beetroot, but I get annoyed when the sky can’t decide if it’s happy or sad. “Again?” I complain to the clouds. Again, the clouds send down a neverending river of droplets.
3/16

Dada says our family has lived in this village, Feizung, since the grandparents of the great-grandparents of the great-great-grandparents of our great-great-great-grandparents! That is more than three hundred years.

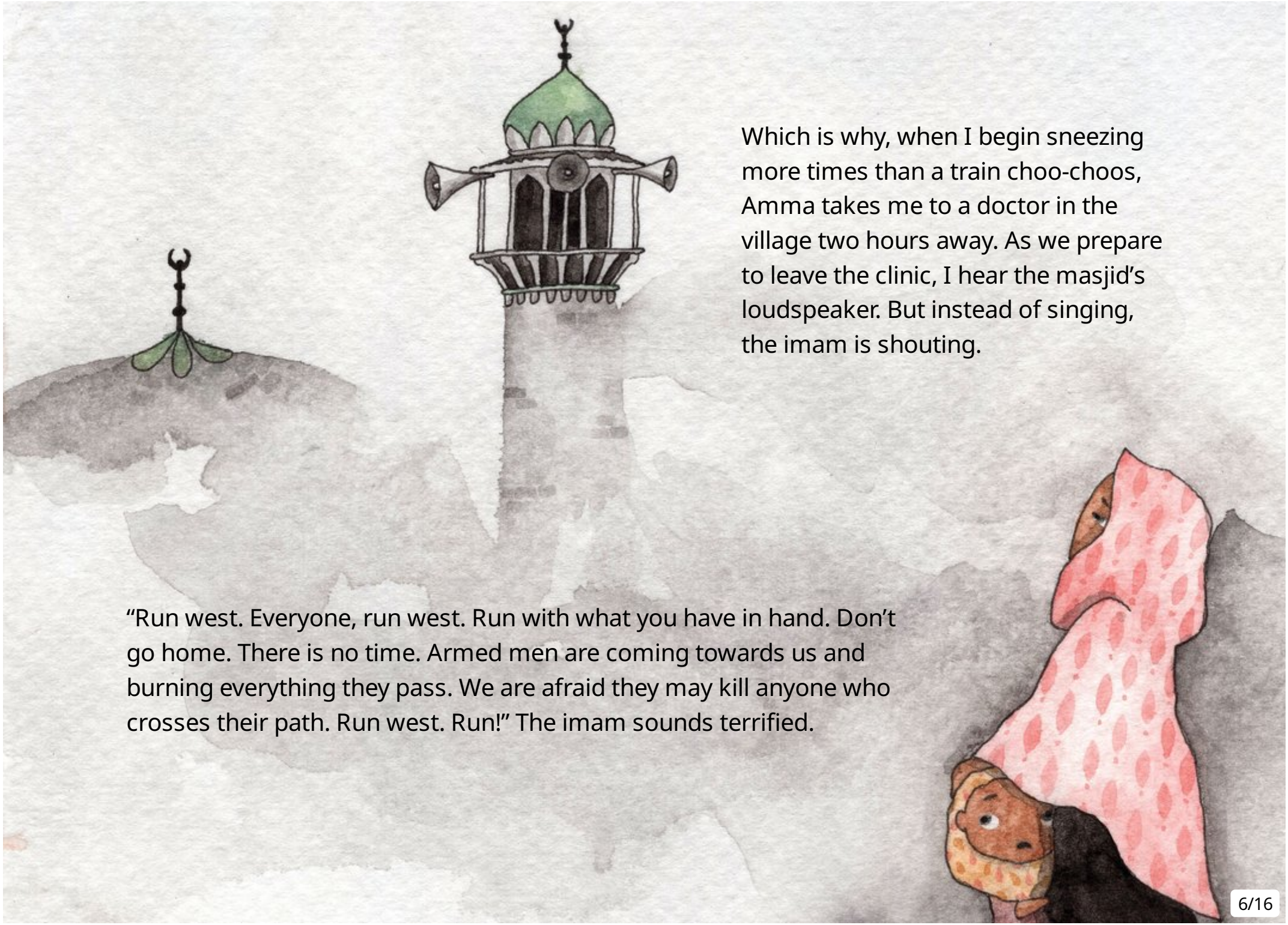
We make scarves and shawls, each one special. But I love most the shawls that Dada makes. They are so big and soft—I sleep with one of his shawls curled under my arms.



Amma weaves words instead of threads. She is the most theatrical storyteller in the whole village—unlike Abbu, who tells stories at the pace of an old tortoise.
Our village is surrounded by rice fields—lush, green and vast—with homes made of bamboo scattered like stars in the sky.



Our country is big, but we are not allowed everywhere. Amma says we can only go to places where people look like us. Luckily, the village has everything I need—my family, my friends, and fields to play in. The only thing we lack is a doctor.



Which is why, when I begin sneezing more times than a train choo-choos, Amma takes me to a doctor in the village two hours away. As we prepare to leave the clinic, I hear the masjid's loudspeaker. But instead of singing, the imam is shouting.

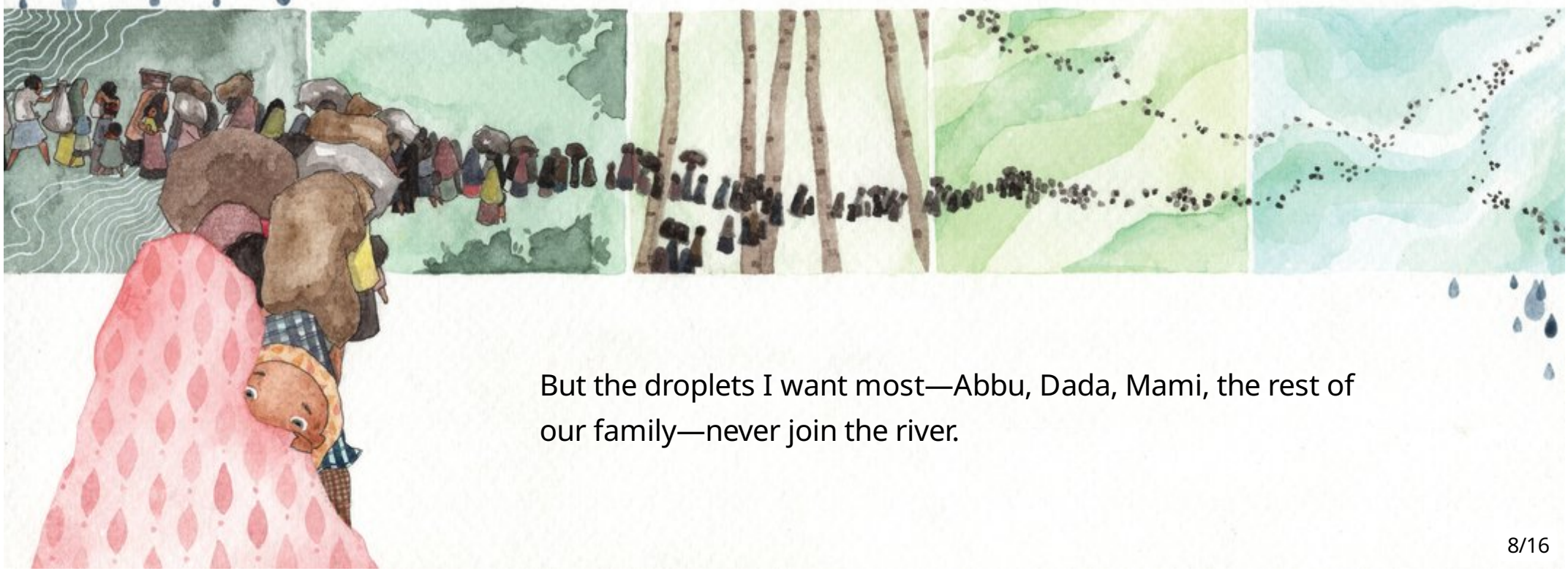
"Run west. Everyone, run west. Run with what you have in hand. Don't go home. There is no time. Armed men are coming towards us and burning everything they pass. We are afraid they may kill anyone who crosses their path. Run west. Run!" The imam sounds terrified.

All I have in my hand is Amma’s hand and all I can do is to hold it tight. Everyone else is holding something or carrying someone.

And so, we run. We run west, with hundreds of other people.

Just like many droplets create a river, we form a river flowing west. Each droplet is a person walking, running, stumbling.

This neverending river crosses rice fields, orchards, forests and hills. New droplets join. Many are lost along the way.



But the droplets I want most—Abbu, Dada, Mami, the rest of our family—never join the river.

The people-river crosses what Amma says is a border. She says we are in a new country now. But everything looks the same.

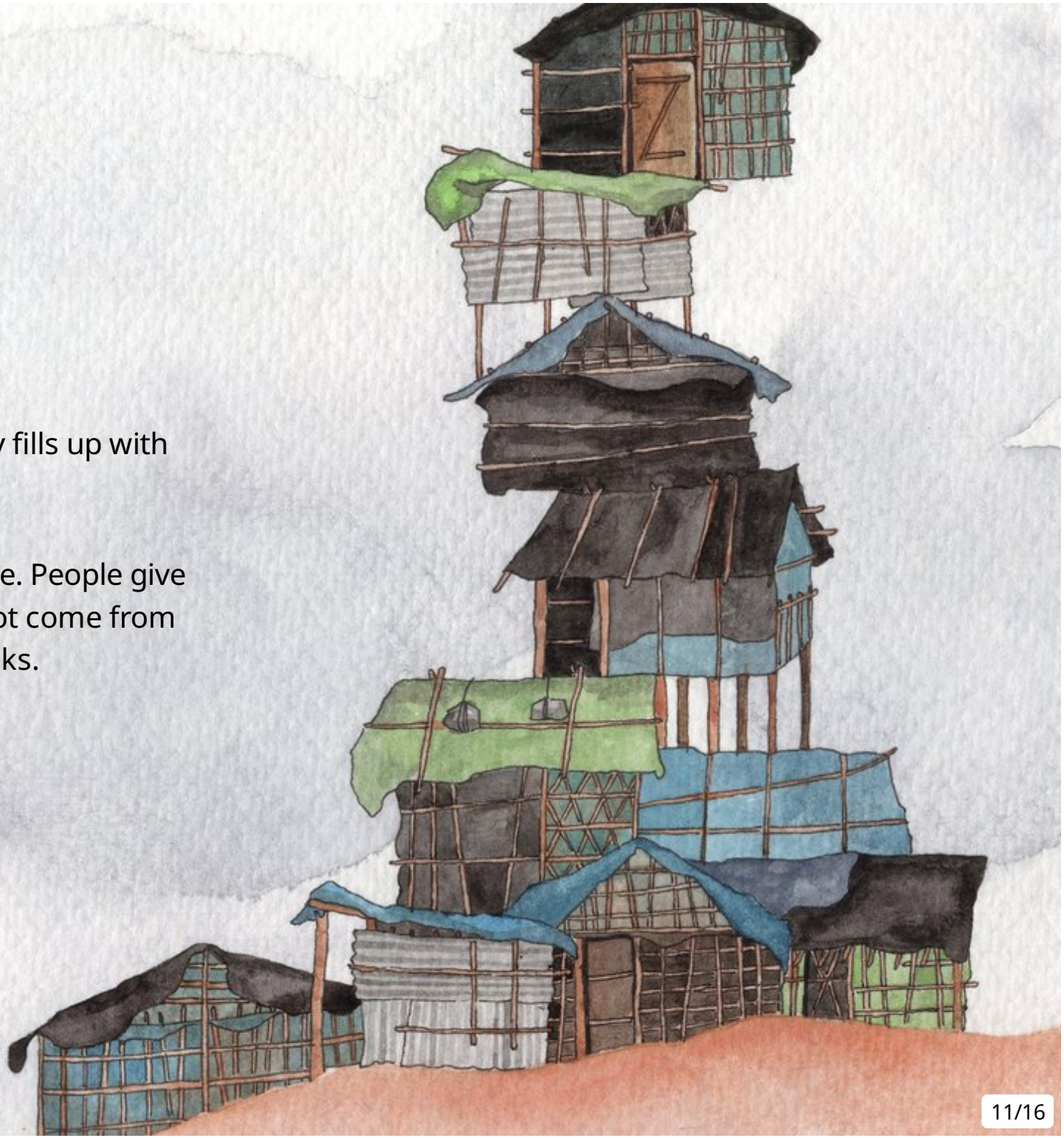
Do rivers know they have crossed borders? Do they even know what borders are?

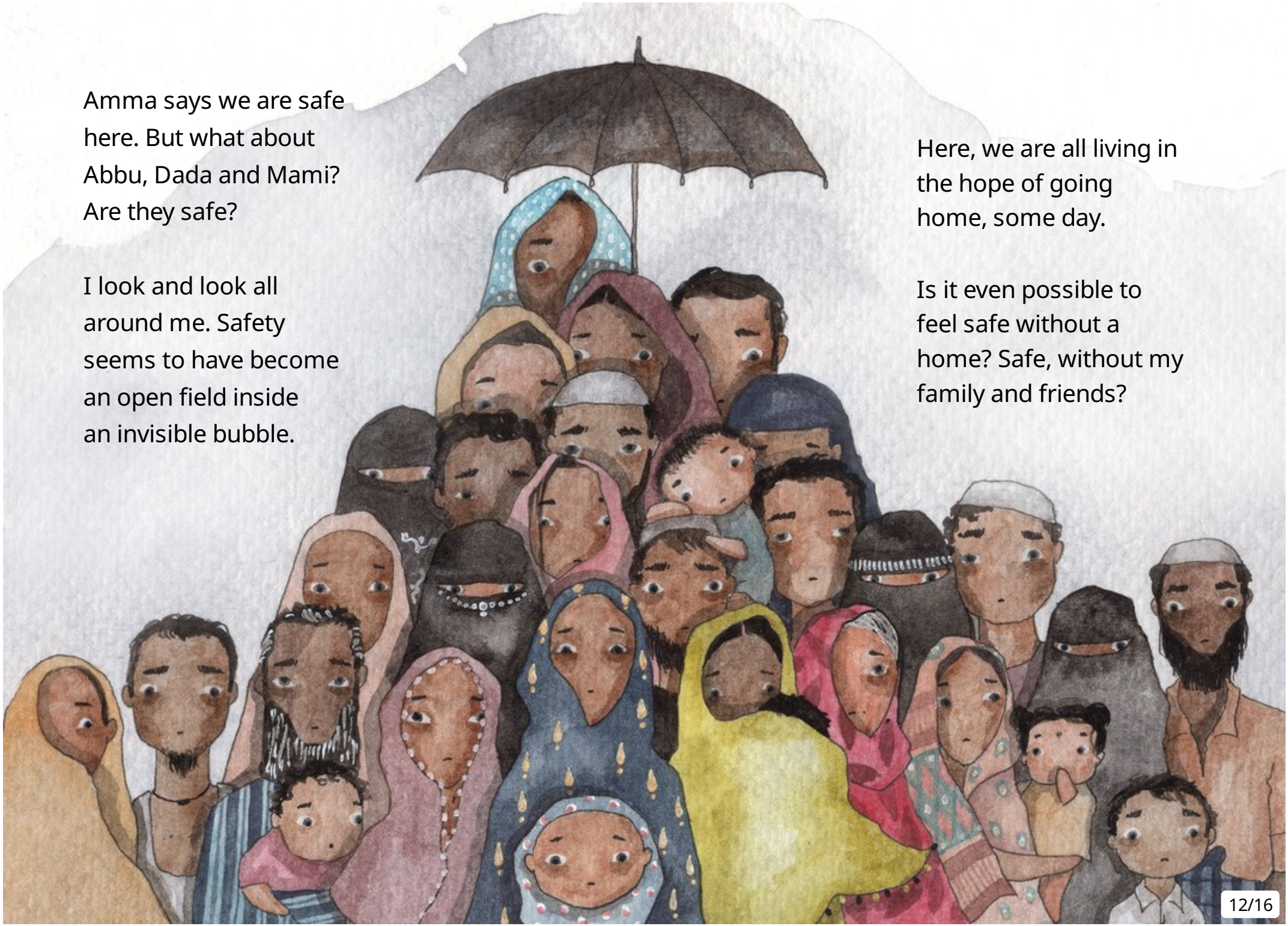
We are in an open, and barren field.

On one horizon, rice fields fade into where our home was. On the other horizon, a town fades into the ocean.

The empty field slowly fills up with tents and huts.

Food is not grown here. People give it to us. Water does not come from wells. It arrives in trucks.





Amma says we are safe here. But what about Abbu, Dada and Mami? Are they safe?

I look and look all around me. Safety seems to have become an open field inside an invisible bubble.

Here, we are all living in the hope of going home, some day.

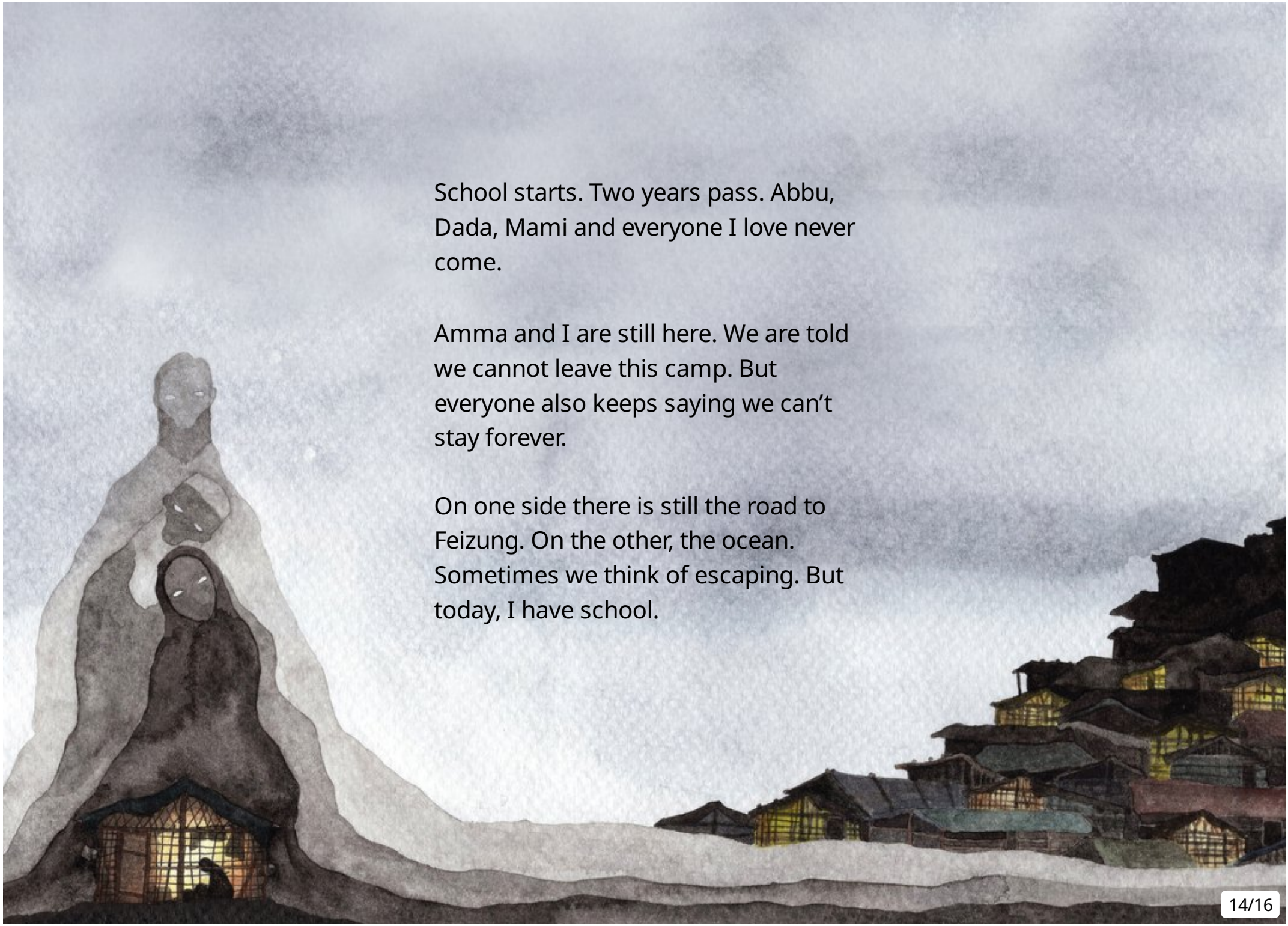
Is it even possible to feel safe without a home? Safe, without my family and friends?

I often wonder, where is home?

Is it here? Or is it where my family is?

Can home be in two places?

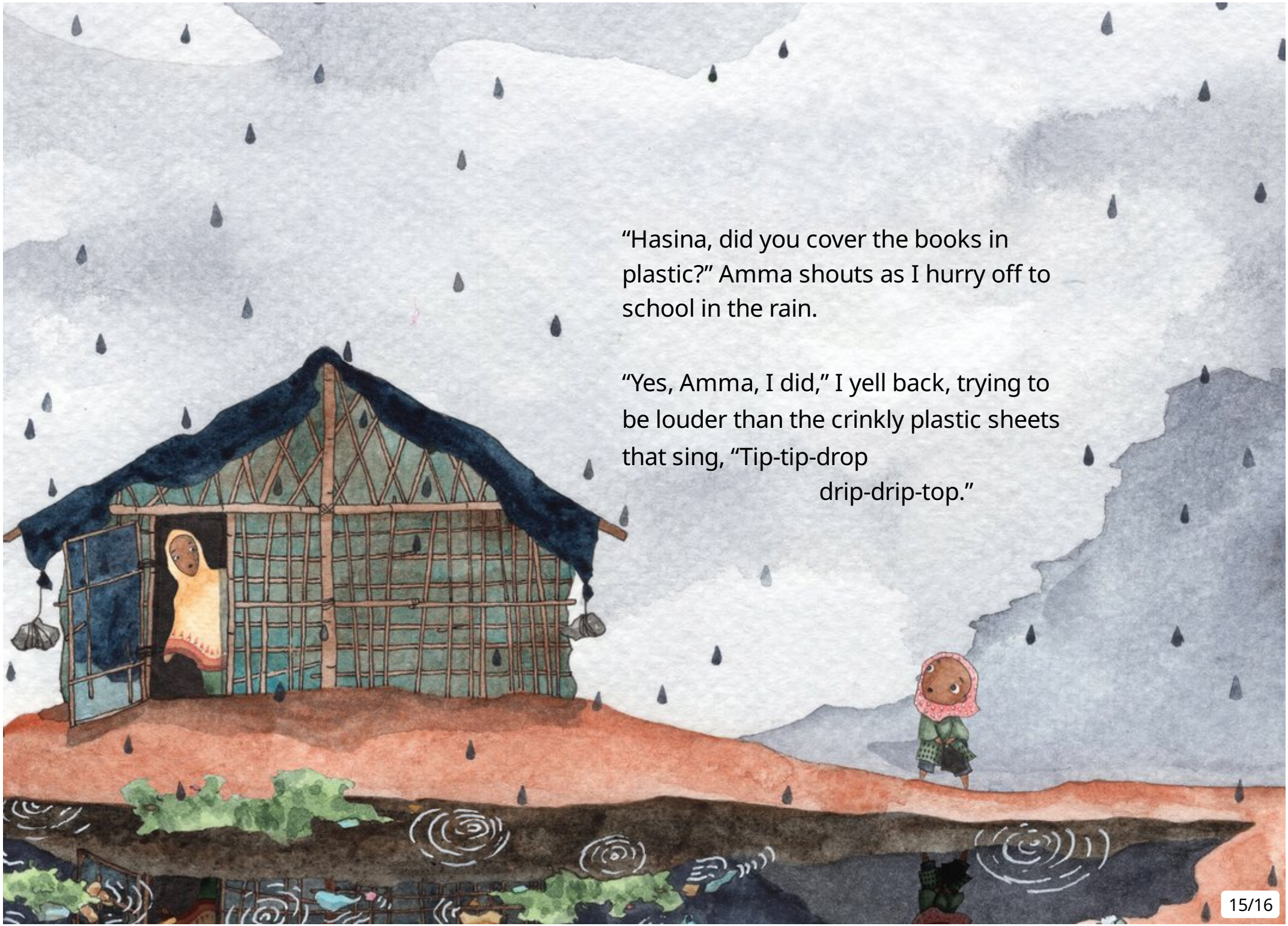
A part of my heart will always be in Feizung. But is it still home if we never go back to it?

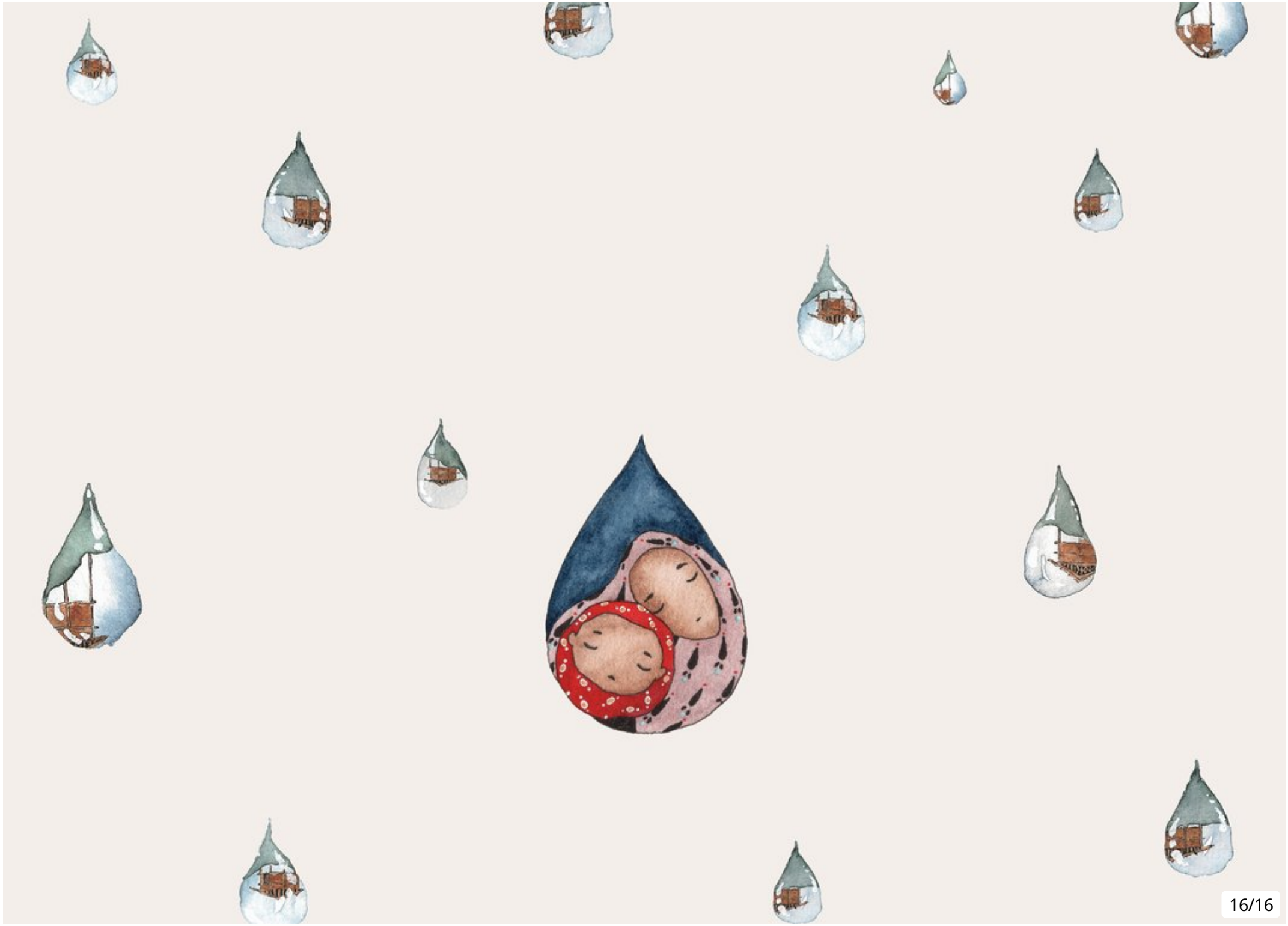


School starts. Two years pass. Abbu, Dada, Mami and everyone I love never come.

Amma and I are still here. We are told we cannot leave this camp. But everyone also keeps saying we can’t stay forever.

On one side there is still the road to Feizung. On the other, the ocean. Sometimes we think of escaping. But today, I have school.


“Hasina, did you cover the books in plastic?” Amma shouts as I hurry off to school in the rain.
“Yes, Amma, I did,” I yell back, trying to be louder than the crinkly plastic sheets that sing, “Tip-tip-drop
drip-drip-top.”



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Home
(English)

Hasina and her family live happily in their rainy village. Until one day the tides turn, and Amma and young Hasina are swept away by fear. They join a river of escaping people. They become refugees in a new country, away from everything that is familiar. A story that explores the meaning of home.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.

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